

Pier 42 Bulkhead Building  
The Embarcadero  
San Francisco  
San Francisco County  
California

HABS No. CA-2287

HABS  
CAL,  
38-SANFRA,  
170-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service, Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PIER 42 BULKHEAD BUILDING

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LOCATION:

The Pier 42 Bulkhead Building is located on the east side of the Embarcadero, between King and Berry Streets in San Francisco, San Francisco County, California.

U.S.G.S. San Francisco North Quadrangle California 7.5 Minute Series (Topographic):  
U.T.M. Coordinates - 3.554000.4181480

SIGNIFICANCE:

The building is significant both in its architectural styling and its association with the early twentieth century development of the San Francisco waterfront -- built in 1918, this building is significant as an example of large scale commercial Mediterranean style architecture.

DESCRIPTION:

The Pier 42 Bulkhead Building is one of a number of stucco pier facades that were erected along the Embarcadero, both north and south of the Ferry Building, between 1910 and 1920. The Embarcadero pier facade structures -- including the Pier 42 Bulkhead Building -- represent an amalgam of several early twentieth century architectural styles generally known as Neo-Classical, Mission Revival and Mediterranean. Bulkhead buildings along the San Francisco waterfront are similar in construction and architectural styles.

The base structure is 132 feet long, 37 feet wide, 30 feet tall with a 5-foot gable roof, and a cement plaster cornice. The middle section rises 26 feet above the base structure and also has a gable roof with a wood cornice. Cordova hip and ridge tiles are used on the roof. The bulkhead building is constructed of stucco (cement plaster) and a brick base. On either side of the central entrance bay, are three arched wood-frame windows with wood caps and bases. The entrance bay measures 20 feet wide and 25 feet tall, and has a steel rolling door. Located just above the set of arched windows are two 15-inch wood discs. The middle section of the structure has Mediterranean style moulds, panels and ornamentation. The interior of the building is of wood-frame construction.

The original plans for the Pier 42 Bulkhead Building were executed in September 1917, and are signed by Monson Hill Pyle. The building underwent a subsequent face-lift in 1934. As originally built, the structure presented a symmetrical appearance, with identical sets of three tall, arched windows on either side of the central entrance along the western front of the edifice. In 1934, the southern triad of arched windows was removed and replaced with a large service bay entrance. In addition, there were other minor modifications to the building's exterior that resulted in a generally more simplified appearance. As one example, some of the original ornamental detailing and cornice work was removed and never replaced. The original wooden pier shed structure, constructed in 1906, extended behind the bulkhead building, with a long-frame utilitarian structure atop it. The dilapidated pier shed structure along with two other piers (Piers 44 and 46A) were demolished in the fall of 1985 to make way for the construction of the South Beach Marina. Later that year, the bulkhead building was relocated from its original location approximately 100 feet to the north along the east side of the Embarcadero roadway, where it is presently situated.

### HISTORY:

The Pier 42 Bulkhead Building was erected in July, 1918; it replaced the original wooden deck structure that had existed at Pier 42 since 1906 (San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and State Historic Preservation Office, 1981). A 1907 photograph of the original, simple wood-frame Pier 42 building has been reproduced in John Kemble's book entitled San Francisco Bay: A Pictorial Maritime History (1957). Concomitant with the construction of the Pier 42 Bulkhead Building in 1918, wooden pilings replaced the inadequately tested concrete sheathed piles that had been a component of the original construction program (Olmsted and Olmsted, 1978).

Pier 42 was used primarily as a maritime pier, as were neighboring piers to the south at China Basin. These piers were used predominantly for ship building and repair. As the pier structures and pilings deteriorated, they became unfit for maritime and industrial operations and were used for open storage. Between the late 70's and summer of 1985, the Pier 42 Bulkhead Building housed several tenants which included a law firm; roofing company; life boat company; forensic office; and boat storage. The pier structure was used for open storage.

Roger and Nancy Olmsted, in their Preliminary Survey of Historical Cultural Resources, Northeastern Waterfront, note that the Pier 42 Bulkhead Building reflects an emphasis on the Mediterranean architectural style (1978). It seems however, that all of the Embarcadero pier facade structures represent an eclectic assortment of several styles, rather than a single scholarly architectural theme. The Embarcadero pier facades were intended to portray the grandeur associated with the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, and designed to convey a sense of civic pride and accomplishment. The buildings also have a functional aspect, as they serve as screens -- architectural stage props, so to speak -- to prevent passersby on the Embarcadero from coming into intimate contact with the industrial activities taking place on the piers behind the facades. As a point of historical interest, Pier 28 which was completed in 1913, represents the oldest and, in the opinion of some, the most elegant of the ornamental pier facades erected along the Embarcadero during the second decade of the twentieth century (Olmsted and Olmsted, 1978).

### SOURCES:

The preceding historical and cultural evaluation consisted of a review of available archival and documentary sources on file at the San Francisco Port Authority, the California Historical Society in San Francisco, the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, the National Maritime Museum at San Francisco and the Library of Archeo-Tec, Inc., Consulting Archaeologists, in Oakland.

### REFERENCES CITED:

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John H. Kemble  
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Press, Cambridge, Maryland

Roger and Nancy Olmsted  
July 29, 1978

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Northeastern Waterfront Advisory  
Committee

HISTORIAN:

Erwin R. Tanjuaquio, Planner, San Francisco Redevelopment Agency  
October 13, 1989